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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: UNITED FRONT RETHINKS CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

REF: A. KABUL 3031
[1](#)B. KABUL 2913
[1](#)C. KABUL 1460
[1](#)D. KABUL 2856
[1](#)E. KABUL 3028

Classified By: Political Counselor Alan Yu for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

[1](#)1. (C/NF) SUMMARY. Senior United Front leaders have de-emphasized their search for a candidate in next year's presidential election and turned to building "national unity," a possible sign they anticipate a Pashtun victory and seek a greater role in national security issues under the next administration. Hazara leader MP Haji Mohammad Mohaqqueq now tells confidants he has agreed to an alliance with the United Front. However, UF leaders say they are resigned to the loss of influential Uzbek leader Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum, who they expect to endorse Karzai following the president's involvement in Dostum's reconciliation with a rival politician last month.

United Front Changes Strategies

[1](#)2. (C/NF) After repeated claims that the opposition coalition was ready to name its slate of presidential and vice presidential candidates, UF leaders now say they have taken a step back and are focusing on building "national unity." In recent meetings with USG officials, former president Burhanuddin Rabbani, Lower House Speaker Yunus Qanooni, First Vice President Ahmad Zia Massoud, Northern Alliance military commander Marshall Fahim, and UF spokesman Sayed Sancharaki have each backed off claims the coalition would announce its slate after the US election (refs A, B). Now, UF members say they seek to build a broader coalition of Afghan leaders that would include influential Pashtuns unlikely to ever join the UF. The goal is to reach a broad consensus on a variety of national security issues, including the timing of and security for elections in 2009 and 2010, reconciliation with insurgent groups, and the use of tribal militias to provide village-level and border security.

[1](#)3. (C/NF) The UF realizes it cannot win the presidency with a candidate from within its own ranks and as prominent independent political leaders remain uncommitted despite heavy lobbying from the UF's senior leadership. With Karzai the only significant, declared candidate and the UF unable to secure an alliance with any major Pashtun leader other than the late king's grandson, Mustafa Zahir Shah, the coalition realizes its chances of winning next year are less than they had calculated several months ago.

[1](#)4. (C/NF) The UF may still run its own candidate -- First Vice President Massoud currently tops most speculation -- but the coalition's new strategy foresees a high chance of a Pashtun victory, either by a Karzai re-election or a second

Pashtun candidate emerging as the consensus choice of the country's leading political figures not tied to the unpopular Karzai. On the likelihood that the next president is a Pashtun, UF leaders are focused on making sure they have a greater role in national security decisions than Karzai has allowed in recent months. Rabbani, Qanooni, and others have said Karzai has shut out non-Pashtuns from key government decisions on reconciliation with the Taliban and arming tribal militias, exacerbating ethnic tensions.

¶5. (C/NF) Qanooni advocates a Loya Jirga-like conference involving international actors as well as Afghans, while Rabbani talks of organizing a shura of "major players" that would formulate policy on national security issues before the next Afghan administration takes office. Either way, the thinking contrasts sharply with the UF's confidence earlier this year that their ethnic alliance had a lock on the electoral math necessary to prevail in next year's election.

Mohaqeq Moves to a Formal Alliance with the UF

¶6. (C/NF) Despite this pessimism, the UF has cemented one of its top political goals -- an alliance with Hazara leader Haji Mohammad Mohaqeq. Mohaqeq has made it clear for months that he has been disappointed with Karzai's leadership (ref C), but until now has stopped short of endorsing the opposition. UF executive committee member Sediq Chakari told PolOff the UF had been negotiating the terms of an alliance with Mohaqeq for months. Mohaqeq's guarantee of a vice presidential slot on the coalition's 2009 slate was one of the sticking points. At a dinner for visiting USUN perm rep

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Amb. Zalmay Khalilzad hosted by Qanooni last week, Mohaqeq confirmed his alliance with the UF. While he had supported the president for the last four years, Mohaqeq said pressure from the Hazara community had convinced him to change his allegiances. One UF member said the Mohaqeq alliance was a first step in the "national unity" strategy.

Dostum Looks to Repay Karzai

¶7. (C/NF) Just as the UF gained Mohaqeq and the influence he commands among an estimated 1 million Hazara voters, it lost the support of Gen. Dostum, who claims a nearly equal level of support among Uzbek voters. Following intervention from the president, Dostum reconciled with a political rival last month, freeing the military leader from house arrest and opening the door to a limited return to the political stage (ref D). Karzai's hand in the general's release stoked enough goodwill between the two that even UF leaders now expect Dostum to endorse the president's re-election. More than any other northern leader, Dostum has mobilized his supporters in the predominately Uzbek Junbesh-e-Milli party for the voter registration campaign, freely advertising his influence in northern provinces (ref E). UF members privately say they view Dostum's efforts as designed to repay Karzai for his intervention, and although several anti-Karzai Junbesh MPs remain committed to the UF, none can boast the popular support among Uzbeks Dostum enjoys.

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